

## Film 7, The Green New Deal

In a way, the Green New Deal, and the debate over it, pulls into sharp focus much of what we have been considering in this course.

As we have repeatedly seen, if we are to successfully mitigate the climate crisis, we will need to make sweeping changes to human cultures across the planet – especially the American consumer culture that we have exported nearly everywhere at this point.

In the case of the US, this is a big job, as it will require us to rethink the American Dream, at least insofar as we in the US (as well as the rest of the wealthy countries) need to take a long hard look at the aspects of our culture that require the emission of enormous amounts of greenhouse gasses.

This fact is not lost on the opponents of the Green New Deal, such as Donald Trump who tweeted that “I think it is very important for the Democrats to press forward with their Green New Deal. It would be great for the so-called ‘Carbon Footprint’ to permanently eliminate all Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas & the Military – even if no other country would do the same. Brilliant!”

To be clear, the Green New Deal proposed by AOC and her colleagues did not suggest that “all Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas & the Military” be “permanently eliminate[d].” Nonetheless, Trump has certainly put together a nice, short list of issues that we need to consider.

We have already taken up the first three, cars, planes, and cows, as largely writing these three things out of our lives would, for quite a few Americans, cut their climate footprints in half – perhaps far more than half if you are a frequent flyer.

And we have also noted that it is imperative that we dramatically reduce fossil fuel extraction, which includes the next two things on Trump’s list: leaving coal, oil and, so-called natural gas in the ground as much as possible.

Finally, some Green Party candidates (not to be confused with the Green New Deal that we are considering) have suggested that we cut military spending in half, in part because the US military is frequently used to protect fossil fuel interests, which was arguably the case with both Gulf

Wars, rather than protect our land and people. Hence, they argue, if we stop acting as a global police force for the fossil fuel industry, the US. could cut its military spending in half.

Incidentally, have you ever wondered why the U.S. military has been so active in the Middle East? In recent decades, we have fought two Gulf Wars there, costing billions of taxpayer dollars and where scores of US. lives were lost. Well, the majority of the planet's proven oil reserves are located in this region of the world. Maybe this is just a coincidence...

In any event, it is important to note that that the Green New Deal proposed by AOC and others (House Resolution #109 of the 116th Congress) makes no mention, to use Trump's list, of "Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas & the Military."

With respect to transportation, for example, the Green New Deal proposes "overhauling transportation systems in the United States...including through investment in (i) zero-emission vehicle infrastructure and manufacturing; (ii) clean, affordable, and accessible public transit; and (iii) high-speed rail."

Since the wording here is not specific, there is still room for zero-emission cars. Similarly, although the inclusion of high-speed rail seems to be offered up as an alternative (at least in certain instances) to air travel, there is no mention of eliminating planes in the Green New Deal.

I'm not, however, a fan of zero-emission cars.

And high-speed rail is a viable and appealing alternative to air travel.

I realize that a lot of people are fans of travel. Hence, when we talk about eliminating *air travel*, it seems that we are talking about eliminating *all travel*. That is not the case. High speed rail can provide a viable and environmentally sound approach to travel over land.

Moving down on Trump's list to "cows," the Green New Deal proposes "working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible." As farmers are generally people who raise crops and ranchers raise livestock like horses, cows, and sheep, the wording here is interesting, as beef and lamb, the two chief problems with respect to methane, or not at all ruled out.

Finally, regarding Trump's final three issues, "Oil, Gas & the Military," the Green New Deal proposed by AOC makes no mention of any of these, nor, for that matter, does it reference coal or fossil fuels at all. It also makes no mention of the military.

Why isn't any of this mentioned when it is obvious that we will need to confront "Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas &...Military" spending to protect fossil fuel interests?

Having not drafted it, I am not exactly sure, but it seems likely to me that, at least in part, the proposal is intentionally vague to avoid the sort of attack that Trump made on it.

Why was Trump eager to discuss these issues and AOC and her colleagues reluctant – especially when these issues will clearly need to be addressed if we are to substantially mitigate the climate crisis?

It seems pretty clear: in drawing attention to them, Trump was hoping to turn public opinion against the Green New Deal, as Americans like beef, cars, air travel, and all the things that fossil fuels give us. Americans also tend to get anxious at the suggestion that we won't have a strong military to protect us from the rest of the world, as the rest of the world is not always happy with us (often for a variety of pretty good reasons relating to our military acting as an international police force for the fossil fuel industry).

Knowing this in advance, AOC and her colleagues likely kept from referencing "Planes, Cars, Cows, Oil, Gas...the Military" and a range of similar issues, lest public opinion be swayed away from the proposal because Americans tend to like these things.

Nonetheless, as Americans, we could, and arguably should, be doing far more than is even intimated in the Green New Deal.

For example, "One out of every five people around the world without access to power lives in India." The government of India would, quite reasonably, like to see this situation remedied. One easy solution would be coal, as India is sitting on vast stores of it. However, it would, of course, be a worldwide climate catastrophe if all this coal was dug up and burned in order to generate electricity.

What's to be done?

Thirty years ago, in his 1992 book *Earth in the Balance*, Al Gore proposed the idea of a "[Global Marshall Plan](#)," which would "require the wealthy nations to allocate money for transferring environmentally helpful technologies to the Third World and to help impoverished nations achieve a stable population and a new pattern of sustainable economic progress. To work, however, any such effort will also require wealthy nations to make a transition themselves that will be in some ways more wrenching than that of the Third World."

The idea here is simple enough, as wealthy countries like the US would help less wealthy countries, like India, develop sustainably. In practice, this could involve knowledge and technology exchange, as well as loans and funding. Incidentally, in her book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein rechristened the idea as a "[Marshall Plan for the Earth](#)."

How might this work in practice? If you watched Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Sequel*, you might recall that at COP21 Gore was feverishly negotiating with the US. company Solar City to license part of their solar technology to India – free of charge, which they, quite commendably, agreed to do.

Why should wealthy countries, and the US in particular, go along with this proposal for a Marshall Plan for the Earth? There are a number of reasons, but two stand out:

1) The US. "[has been the world's leading economic power since the end of the 19th century.](#)" Not coincidentally, this corresponds with our developing a massive fossil-fuel economy. Unfortunately for our global climate, this had a byproduct: as I have noted before, 25% of the carbon dioxide put into our planet's atmosphere by human beings was put there by the US. Since we caused so much of this problem, we have a clear – as least as far as I am concerned – moral obligation to help remedy what we have done.

2) Even if we are not moved by the above moral argument, it is in America's best interest to help the world develop sustainably. Why? If the rest of the world follows our lead and develops by way of fossil fuels, it will be a disaster for the planet. Sooner or later, that coal burned in India will translate into problems for the US, such as coastal flooding, wildfires, extreme weather, etc.

But here is the problem, if just mentioning the fact that we will need to curb our love of beef and cars risks turning the American public against climate action, how do we get Americans to go along with something like a Marshall Plan for the Earth in an era increasingly defined by nationalism, reduced international aid, and closed borders?

This takes us to the root of the problem with climate action. At least climate action in America.

On the one hand, we need to make sweeping changes to our American way of life that will involve cars, planes, cows and a whole lot more. In this sense, the Green New Deal does not go far enough – at the very least it could be far more specific – in outlining just what sort of changes that we will need to make if we hope to get through this crisis, such as a Marshall Plan for the Earth.

On the other hand, just mentioning cultural changes related to beef, cars, and airplanes risks turning Americans away from serious climate action – which is likely why AOC and her colleagues didn't mention them but Trump did.

To put the issue more simply: while the Green New Deal is the best proposal for climate action that we currently have – and, let me be very, very clear in noting that I certainly endorse it and will vote for it – it is at once not doing enough and at the same time is too much for many, likely most, Americans to get behind.

I am curious to hear what you make of the Green New Deal, now that you have read the legislation proposing it and watched some short documentaries on it. Is it enough? Or is it too much to endorse? Most importantly, how exactly do we get enough Americans to go along with the Green New Deal to vote it into being?

#### Class discussion of The Green New Deal

Note that the following observations, which are in italics, have not been paraphrased or altered, though I do correct the occasional typo and, because of space concerns, often just part of the comment is reproduced here along with my reply. In working through these, I will first quote a student's observation, followed by my thoughts.

Quite a few of the comments on the Green New Deal expressed sentiments similar to this one:

*Unfortunately, I was one of the people who was misled and misinformed about the Green New Deal due to the media's portrayal of it. All I knew was that it was about climate change and that it was radical.*

Here is another similar comment:

*When you assigned the reading of The Green New Deal, I had mentioned it to my parents and they immediately started talking about how radical the idea of getting rid of all cars, planes and cows was. But once I read it, I was super confused because [I felt] like I was missing something. The Green New Deal said nothing in detail, and I felt almost tricked. After watching the videos, I realized that the media and politicians have been overtly tricking Americans into believing this solution is worse than our current situation. Platforms only talk about the negative effects of the Green New Deal, leaving passionate activists to sound like they are crazy. Because they are so outnumbered, the voice of reason is being trampled by climate deniers and those who are desperate to continue business as usual. As a nation, it is our job to implement a change. Maybe if we take this first step, other countries will follow in our footsteps and we can save the planet.*

The Green New Deal is the most sweeping climate plan ever proposed in the US Congress. Arguably, it is one of the most important Resolutions ever proposed in Congress, period.

Why? Because it outlines the sort of changes that we need to make to mitigate the climate crisis, which is one of the greatest collective challenges that humanity has ever faced. The Green New Deal really is just an outline (and looks and reads like one), as it doesn't go into any issue in any detail. This is one of its greatest strengths, as it can be read in a single sitting - really, it can be read in just a few minutes. (As you are going to be reading House Resolution #109 of the 116th Congress for Climate Crisis 101, you might want to note how long it took you to get through it.)

Given that it is such an important document, it is not surprising that many Americans have heard of the Green New Deal. And given that the American public has been, in various degrees, polarized on the climate crisis, it is not surprising that many Americans have an opinion on the Green New Deal.

But what is surprising – in fact, really surprising – is that very few people have actually read this short document. And yet, many Americans have definite opinions about it. Many, like the person who made the first comment here, just know "that it,,[is],,,about climate change and that it...[is]...radical." Or, like the parents of the person who made the second comment, that it is about "getting rid of all cars, planes and cows."

For a democracy like ours to work, the voting public needs to understand the issues impacting our country, our planet, and all of us, individually and collectively. The difficulty

is that there is a layer between us and the lawmakers that we elect to serve as our representatives in government. That layer is the media.

In general, where do we get many of our ideas? Sometimes, it's through direct human contact with friends and family. But where do they get many of their ideas?

In the third quarter of the 21st century, most of us, either directly or indirectly, learn about the world through various media that is disseminated on the Internet. Thus, when it comes to learning about something like the Green New Deal, we generally learn about it indirectly. Unfortunately, all sorts of perspectives are bandied about on the Internet.

For example, when I entered "Green New Deal," into my browser (Google), while I was offered a NY times article on "[What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained](#)," a Fox News Op-ed also popped up entitled "[Green New Deal would destroy American Dream, create American Nightmare](#)." If you knew little or nothing about the Green New Deal, the idea that you formed of it would be very much guided by which of these articles you read. This is in part why perceptions of the Green New Deal vary significantly among Americans.

But what if you just took a few minutes and sat down and read House Resolution #109? After doing just that, as it was assigned for Climate Crisis 101, someone made this apt comment:

*The Green New Deal seemed honestly confusing, but after...[I read it]...I was surprised to see that the whole document has two major goals: What we need to do to solve the climate crisis and how the American people will be protected. Looking at it like this, makes it seem much more simple and doable.*

The advantage of directly in countering something like the Green New Deal is that we can form our own opinions of it. I am firmly of the belief that most Americans are capable of doing this.

Given my research and teaching interests, it is hardly surprising that people ask me what they can do to help mitigate the climate crisis. Many people expect me to say something like eat less beef, or drive or fly less. While I absolutely endorse these actions, I believe that the #1 that each of us can do is to read and learn about this crisis.

Once a person learns the truth about this unfolding crisis and its severity, it seems more than a little likely that they would not only want to do something about it themselves, but to elect politicians who would put forth, to use this person's words, a plan to "solve the climate crisis," while making sure that "the American people will be protected."

*Last fall, I took a course on news, politics and democracy within the Communication program. We learned about how the media relies on sensationalism, and is not fulfilling its responsibilities to our democracy. Unfortunately, consumers are attracted to the spectacle and don't want to be shown things they don't understand. So rather than teaching voters about the details of policies*

*and issues, the media “dumbs-down” the message and relies on partisanship to tell voters how to feel about a policy. In this class, we discussed tactical framing by the media in great detail. It’s a strategic move by the media to attract viewers and make it more difficult for people to form educated opinions. Tactical framing doesn’t care for the capacity to solve the problem, only the political debate. While the media is supposed to be summarizing relevant issues on behalf of the citizens (in order for them to formulate opinions of their own), they often complicate the narrative and make voters more cynical about politics and its ability to get anything done. In this way, rather than educating voters, the media serves as a tool for polarization. With the Green New Deal, the media (and the politicians themselves in their discussion of the bill) focus on its controversy. More specifically, Republicans have correlated the deal with socialism, creating fear within their supporters that the bill is not about the environment, but more about a complete restructuring of our system. Therefore, anyone that doesn’t support socialism is likely to reject the bill before learning any of its contents.*

Unfortunately, not only do some media outlets downplay or outright deny the severity of the climate crisis, nearly all media outlets are in the business of, as this person succinctly notes, "attract[ing] viewers." Consequently, instead of, to again quote this person, "summarizing relevant issues on behalf of the citizens (in order for them to formulate opinions of their own)," they instead stage a media spectacle of two sides facing off on the issue. In this way, as this person aptly notes, "the media serves as a tool for polarization."

There can also be a bit of a slight of hand here, as something like socialism can be made to take the place of the issue at hand, the Green New Deal. Hence, by tactically framing this as an issue of socialism, viewers will likely dismiss this important Resolutions without ever knowing what it is actually about.

This is, of course, a vexing state of affairs, as the media is often not only failing to explain important issues like the Green New Deal to the public, they are allowing (arguably, encouraging) it to be seen as a polarized political issue, which greatly reduces the chance of it being supported by the very voters that it would benefit.

*[T]here has been an active campaign to confuse and misdirect the public from the true facts surrounding the Green New Deal, just as we saw in Merchants of Doubt just a few weeks ago. With all this being said, how is the average American supposed to make any sort of informed decision about whether this proposed plan is a good idea or not? Yet again, I found myself sitting at my desk, frustrated with the cyclical nature of the fight against climate change and how all the efforts being made seem to be going to waste.*

This person rightly notes that the fossil fuel industry and its affiliates have made enormous efforts to discredit the Green New Deal. This is, indeed, more than a little frustrating, especially, as the previous person noted, the Green New Deal is a plan to "solve the climate crisis" and to make sure that "the American people will be protected" while doing so.

Simply put, the Green New Deal is designed to protect the planet and the American people. So, what's not to like?



Well, if you happened to be in the fossil fuel business, it is more than a little disconcerting. After all, as Bill Gates has noted, "[30 years from now, some of those oil companies will be worth very little](#)" when we replace fossil fuels with renewable energy. If the Green New Deal were to be enacted, their lease on life could be far less than 30 years.

Hence, as they are in a life and death battle for their companies and industry, it is hardly surprising that they would be working hard to turn public sentiment away from the Green New Deal, even though it is meant to benefit and protect the planet and Americans.

*I am assuming that the title of this deal is a reference to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. This is most likely meant to mirror the circumstance of that time to our present day. America is facing one of the world's most pressing issues and the government needs to create sweeping change in order for its people to thrive again. Similar to the New Deal, the Green New Deal aims to assume the responsibility for transitioning the American people from one stage to another.*

The Green New Deal is indeed meant to reference Roosevelt's New Deal from the 1930s.

["The New Deal was a series of programs, public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations enacted by...Roosevelt...between 1933 and 1939."](#) Through programs like the National Labor Relations Act and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the US government stepped in to protect the rights of workers and citizens, often against businesses that were exploiting them. Consequently, the goal was to provide things that we now often take for granted, such as "[a forty-hour workweek, a minimum wage, worker's compensation, unemployment compensation, a federal law banning child labor, direct federal aid for unemployment relief, Social Security, a revitalized public employment service and health insurance.](#)"

But why invoke the New Deal, with its focus on protection for workers and citizens, when proposing sweeping climate legislation?

Consider coal, which is in certain ways the most problematic of all fossil fuels. In order to get the same amount of energy, [coal releases roughly twice as much CO2 as does natural gas](#). Hence, we need to immediately act on legislation that would leave as much as coal as possible in the ground.

The problem is that there are certain areas of the United States, such as West Virginia, where a significant number of people have for generations made their living from the mining of coal. What would happen to them if we quickly phase out the coal industry?

Like Roosevelt's New Deal, the Green New Deal aims to provide all sorts of safeguards to protect these workers by "providing resources, training, and high-quality education, including higher education, to all people of the United States, with a focus on frontline and vulnerable communities [like these coal extracting communities], so that all people of the United States may be full and equal participants in the Green New Deal mobilization." If we did not implement protections like these, many people would potentially suffer as we transition into a new, sustainable, economy and world.

*I appreciate how the Green New Deal addresses many different promises such as jobs, healthcare, education, and economic freedom. I also appreciate its commitment to helping ordinary Americans in the transition away from fossil fuels as I feel as that is of utmost importance...I feel as if the changes it proposes have many ways to help Americans that may be negatively affected by them.*

Although detractors to the Green New Deal frequently draw attention to the fact that it will cost millions of jobs and hurt displaced workers, it is worth pausing to consider what sort of jobs will be lost. For example, as we have noted, the coal industry needs to largely go away.

However, in terms of working conditions and other impacts of this industry, this is not a bad thing. "[The rate of fatal injuries in the coal mining industry...\[is\]...nearly six times the rate for all private industry.](#)" Indeed, it is [the seventh most dangerous job in America](#). In addition, there are a range of other health related problems associated with this industry, such as heart and lung disease.

There are also significant environmental consequences here that are separate and apart from the CO2 released when coal is burned. For example, "[\[i\]n 2018, methane emissions from coal mining and abandoned coal mines accounted for about 11% of total U.S. methane emissions.](#)" The great deal of attention has rightfully been given to the beef industry, which is responsible for releasing 28% of methane emissions. However, the coal industry is responsible for methane emissions that are around 40% of this. In other words, you would need to convince 40% of the US population to stop eating beef - which would be quite a feat! - to be the equivalent of shutting down the coal industry.

Finally, the coal industry causes significant environmental devastation in mining areas. For example, "[\[s\]trip mining destroys landscapes, forests and wildlife habitats at the site of the mine when trees, plants, and topsoil are cleared from the mining area. This in turn leads to soil erosion and destruction of agricultural land. When rain washes the loose](#)" This causes "an increased risk of chemical contamination of ground water when minerals in upturned earth seep into the water table, and watersheds are destroyed." All this can cause whole communities to be displaced as these areas become largely uninhabitable.

So, while jobs will certainly be lost, these were by no means good, safe jobs. Moreover, this industry causes a host of environmental problems separate and apart from the manner by which it contributes to the climate crisis.

Setting aside the environmental and climate implications of coal mining, there is much to suggest that this industry needs to go away on social justice grounds, as it is simply wrong to subject human beings to the working conditions of this word.

There were more than a few strong, positive reactions to the short film "[A Message From the Future With Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#)." Here is an example:

*That video made me have hope again on politicians, mostly because the words from her mouth were positive and hopeful, instead of the usual pessimistic and narcissistic comments we usually get. This is refreshing, this made me have hope that we are in the right direction to change how government acts and to have a better chance in fixing our problems. It was depressing to hear Dianne Feinstein, someone who is representing OUR state, say that it cannot pass. But then who have someone like Cortez, who is bringing a new optimistic point of view to the muddy and toxic waters that is politics and it is definitely what we need when most of us react with cynicism.*

There is a whole sub-genre of science fiction known as climate fiction, or more commonly, simply "cli-fi." For the most part, these works imagine a rather dismal future. As such, they are important, as they are something of a cautionary tale of what could happen if we do not act quickly and decisively to mitigate the climate crisis. However, they are often disturbing and depressing.

In a decided contrast, AOC lays out a wonderfully optimistic future – an entirely different kind of cli-fi. As far as I'm concerned, she presents an inspiring model of what is needed: for us to imagine a better future and then tirelessly work to bring it about.

Incidentally, AOC may have coined the term “climate delayer” in an Instagram video as a response to Dianne Feinstein, one of the two US senators from California. So, in addition to climate deniers, we need, according to AOC, to also be concerned about individuals who we might expect to help the cause, like Feinstein, who nonetheless failed to act to mitigate the crisis.

Here is another comment on the AOC film:

*I loved AOC's film and her narration. I am a huge fan of hers, so I was immediately drawn to what she has to say. I am also majoring in art and have always had a love for painting so listening to her powerful language associated with the beautiful watercolor time-lapse was quite beautiful to watch and see. I was left wondering, after watching these films, "who in their right mind could watch these and not agree with and support the Green New Deal? It baffles me, honestly.*

["A Message From the Future With Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez"](#) is a rather remarkable little film. It is shot with a single camera from above with a fixed-focus on an artist's work table. The entire film is composed of a series of paintings made in response to the voiceover by AOC. In many cases, we actually see the hand of the artist, Molly Crabapple, making the paintings. The only editing is to speed up the creation of the images, which likely took quite a few days.

It is rather remarkable that such an effective film can be made in such a simple fashion. Of course, there is quite a bit of artistic skill on display here, but this is not some expensive and complicated Hollywood production. It is just an artist caught in the process of visually bringing some important words to life.

I mention this because it makes clear the central role that imagination and communication has to play in the climate crisis. However, it need not be elaborate or expensive in the age

of YouTube, where a talented person (perhaps like you) can send out a moving and effective message to thousands, even millions, of people.

*By increasing government spending and revolutionizing infrastructure, it is possible to create millions of “good, high-wage jobs to provide security for all of those in the US” (GND). It is crucial that these jobs provide equal pay for everyone regardless of race, class, gender, citizenship, and physical aptitude. Moreover, the Green New Deal will give Americans the right to a living wage, welfare services, adequate, affordable housing, quality education, and health care; all of which will help mitigate the fears that customarily accompany periods of significant change. These efforts will create healthy, sustainable, inclusive communities that are ready and willing to adapt to major policy reforms.*

Wow, I couldn't have said it better myself!

So, allow me to conclude with that thoughtful comment.